

## **The *Stay Connected Mental Health Project*** *Backgrounder*

On August 22, 2009, the world lost a talented, sensitive and enthusiastic individual when Alex Fountain took his own life. He was 20 years old. Alex was the son of Fred and Elizabeth Fountain, and dear brother of Katharine Fountain. In memory of Alex, Fred and Elizabeth have made an extraordinary gift to the QEII Foundation that will help young people stay connected.

The vision of the five-year *Stay Connected Mental Health Project* is to culturally shift how youth and their families transition from pediatric to adult-based services, at the IWK Health Centre and Capital Health, respectively. The project will also help build closer partnerships with local universities to support the mental health and addiction care needs of our students.

Through enhanced mental health literacy, strategic planning and collaborative approaches across health care settings, we will overcome stigma, limited resources and system issues that conspire to create barriers. The ***Stay Connected Mental Health Project*** will replace these barriers with pathways to access care.

Background information:

- Untreated and under-treated mental health and addiction problems, particularly during the transitional ages of 15-25, can contribute to high-risk behaviours such as suicide, substance abuse and being bullied.
- At the age of 19, youth are transitioned from pediatric care at the IWK Health Centre to adult-based mental health services available through Capital Health. Currently there are gaps between the systems that need to be filled so our youth have a smoother transition and do not feel lost.
- The ***Stay Connected Mental Health Project*** recognizes the disruption in the transition, and aims to alter our health systems' regular practice with youth and their families transitioning to adult-based mental health services.

The ***Stay Connected Mental Health Project*** involves a number of community partners, local universities, the IWK Health Centre and Capital Health. A few of the project components are described below:

- **Youth Readiness Program:** an annual workshop to help prepare youth for increased self-management of their health care needs to make the transition to adult mental health and addictions care easier.

**Family Mentorship Training:** family mentors who have previous experience working with mental health and addiction services can provide support to other families who have youth in transition to adult-based care. Helping families empower their teens to take on the independent management of their health conditions.

- **Teenage Primer for Adult Clinicians:** a bi-annual day-long training program to enhance the skills of adult-based mental health and addictions care providers, and build familiarity in working with teens and young adults.
- **Mental Health and Addictions Services Landscape Map:** development of a “landscape map” of mental health and addiction services for IWK clinicians and physicians to better identify the services and pathways available when youth transition to adult-based services through Capital Health.
- **Transition Coordinator:** develop a coordinator position housed at Capital Health to guide educational, policy and process steps to implement transitional-stage care between the health systems.
- **University-specific initiatives:** a variety of initiatives will be directed at Dalhousie, Saint Mary’s, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, University of King’s College and Mount Saint Vincent University students, including electronic mental health literacy resources, education opportunities for faculty and staff on how to identify early signs of severe distress in students, and the use of peer support.